

WI National Guard: 1158th Transportation Company hauls M60 Patton tank to Brandon to honor local veterans

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BRANDON, Wis. — Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers received a valuable real-world opportunity to train on loading, transporting and offloading an inoperative heavy military vehicle. Brandon Community Park received some vintage military hardware to salute the veterans in its community.

Jim Otto, who heads the community's Veterans Day program and serves on Brandon's Veterans Memorial Committee helped lead an effort to bring a veterans' memorial to Brandon Community Park several years ago. That vision came to fruition, but the community sought one piece to pull it all together. That piece was finally delivered June 27 when the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 1158th Transportation Company, based in Beloit with a detachment in Black River Falls, delivered a M60 Patton tank that needed to be moved from another Wisconsin community to the park for permanent display.

"We have a huge park for our small town, and we had softball every night and it was well lit, and we had a lake down there, playground areas, cookout areas, and shelters," said Otto, a member of Brandon's American Legion Post 378 and also a veteran of both the Wisconsin Army National Guard and the Air Force. "You name it, we've got it, but we didn't have a veterans memorial, so we decided we would build one."

Earlier this year, an opportunity to bring the M60 Patton tank to Brandon from Westfield presented itself, and Brandon jumped on the opportunity. They just

needed a way to move it the roughly 72 miles from Westfield.

Enter the 1158th Transportation Company, which transports heavy equipment like tanks and other vehicles as part of its military duties. The 1158th received the mission and planned to execute it during its two-week annual training period at Fort McCoy. The mission provided an excellent real-world training opportunity for the Soldiers of the 1158th, many of whom had just completed training and licensing on the Heavy Equipment Transport — or HET — that could haul the tank into place.

Spc. Abigail DeGuire, a truck driver in the 1158th, had recently been licensed on the HET as part of her training at Fort McCoy, and received the mission to haul the tank from Westfield to Brandon. She said the mission provided an excellent opportunity to exercise the skills she learned in her HET class and conduct a real mission similar to the missions she will complete later in her career. In fact, DeGuire volunteered for a mission to haul the Army's tanks around Fort Hood, Texas in July, where the experience she gained hauling a display tank will prove useful.

"After we got through our school and everything, we were the next day, after we passed all of our tests and exams, I was able to put what I learned to use right away the day after," she said. "In doing that, you get to learn multiple ways in how the winching operations work, how the team is supposed to work.

"We got to see how the real Army works, the teamwork, and how the camaraderie is really important in making really stressful situations come together because we all get along," she added later. "I feel a lot more confident in my abilities as a truck driver, that's for sure."

Staff Sgt. Clint Kramer, who helped lead the mission, said the training value was immeasurable because the tank they had to haul was inoperable. The fact that it also benefited a local Wisconsin community was an added benefit, he said.

Usually, Kramer said, the Soldiers can drive the vehicle they need to haul right onto the trailer, but in this case, they had to winch the tank onto the trailer and strap it down. That kind of training is invaluable in preparing the Soldiers for future missions whether conducting them in support of their federal mission as part of the Army's primary combat reserve or in a domestic mission supporting civil authorities as the first military responder during emergencies.

"The kind of truck and the kind of trailer that we have, we have winches that are

made to pull inoperable vehicles onto our trailers, and that's the only way to do it is by winching it on," he said. "We don't run into it very often. Usually everything we load is mobile and it can just be driven right on and we can chain it to the trailer. But it was good MOS (military occupational specialty) training for the fact that we had from our HET school, we took one student from each instructor's class who performed the best and they were chosen to go on the mission with us.

"You get very limited winch time to operate the winches, and this just gave them a whole other perspective," Kramer added. "They were able to get onto the winches, operate the winching system, all the handles, see how it feels to load a vehicle and the weight of pulling a vehicle up onto the trailer with the winches and just seeing all of the different variables you could be looking at when you're trying to put one of these on."

The mission went smooth, and within a few hours of leaving Westfield, the M60 Patton was in a place of honor in Brandon serving as a tribute to veterans. Waiting for the Soldiers when they arrived was a grateful community who had readied lunch and refreshments for them as a token of their appreciation.

"It was awesome," DeGuire said. "The biggest thing that impacted me was there was a lot of vets who came up and talked to me about their experiences in Vietnam or in the wars, so just knowing that we were giving back to them meant a lot to me, and also the little girl that came up to me and wanted a picture, that was really cool, because when I was a kid, I always thought that Army people were pretty cool, and now that I'm in, I can kind of see where that girl was coming from."

Kramer agreed, noting that he and the other Soldiers greatly appreciate the community's support and hospitality during their time in both Westfield and Brandon.

"It makes any Soldier, especially with this kind of MOS, to haul this kind of vehicle, we want to get chosen for these types of missions," he said. "These are not only MOS-driven and reinforcement of the kind of training that we need, but it gives any Soldier great pride to do that kind of mission and take a tank and put it in a veterans memorial to honor the ones that never made it back. Anything that we can do to help that, we would jump at the opportunity."

Likewise, Otto and the rest of Brandon appreciated the mission as well.

“The coordination of these young recruits and military was outstanding,” Otto said. “Everyone knew what was going on. They knew exactly what their job, and there was nobody shirking anything, and everybody was busy. It was like an ant hill or a beehive. Everybody knew what they were supposed to do, and they did a great job.

“Everything that the military needed to do they did,” he continued. “It was a splendid effort, and the outcome was fantastic.”